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AP English Language and Composition

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Researched Argument

Section I

*Amusing Ourselves to Death* is a compelling book that has greatly informed me on the variety and change of public discourse in American history. Television is presently the largest form of public discourse in America. Neil Postman believes that television has changed every aspect in American culture. "Television is our culture's principal mode of knowing about itself" (Postman, Neil). I agree with Postman in his claim that entertainment has become the sole focus of the 21st century. His research is valid in concluding that television has become a huge part of our society and strongly influences our everyday lives. The main focus in the conclusion of Postman’s book claims that the way that publicity is presented is a dangerous approach to public discourse. I believe that Postman’s argument against current public discourse is very strong and I agree with Postman’s critique on television and the dangerous surroundings it creates in society.

Section II

Neil Postman was very credible in his approach for informing society of the dangers of technology, and in particular, television. Neil Postman wrote in several magazines discussing similar topics and eventually created a college course based on media ecology. Neil Postman became a university professor at NYU. Postman was also the chairman of the Department of Culture and Communication. Postman was a practicing humanist and believed that there was a limit to the promises introduced by technology. Postman argued that television was taking over the role of the printed word. He firmly believed that television images were planted in the public’s brain, as opposed to the printed word was in the 19th century. Postman provided many examples of how television was becoming the main source for several different components of society such as education, religion, politics, and news broadcasting. Postman provides many examples on how these aspects of society are being turned into a form of entertainment by television. Postman’s other books deal with technology and different aspects of society and are similar to *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.  Postman is effective in giving certain examples of our society main focus being on television and entertainment. Postman is very effective in his approach to inform society is slowly ruining itself from television.

Section III

Postman begins the book by delving into the issue with current public discourse. Issues such as President Reagan being a former Hollywood actor and how businessmen understand that it is not entirely the quality of the product they are selling, but the display in which the product is introduced. Another example of the fixation on images in our society is how news broadcasters are always chosen by their looks which then prove the validity of the information they are giving. If a news broadcaster is unattractive or has somewhat of a displeasing appearance, then the information they are releasing to the public is believed to be false, solely concluded by how the information-giver’s appearance is. Postman starts with giving these examples to show how the public is focused solely on images in a given situation rather than the actual content given. Another example based on image is how the twenty-seventh president of the United States, William Howard Taft, would not be an effective leader for our country in a time where the public is mainly focused on image rather than content and validity of a candidate. In the 20th century our culture was not entirely focused on the image of the president, hence why President Taft was an effective leader despite his heavy physical appearance. In the pre-television era, it was common for United States Presidents to walk down the street unnoticed by the public because the public had very little resources to view the president’s appearance since the common tool of public discourse was the radio or newspaper. Since television has juristically changed our culture, we generally vote for a presidential candidate that would “appear” to be fit for the job, rather than the specific views he or she stands behind. This is a problem that has been generated ever since the invention of television and has increased greatly over time.

Since the printing press was invented in the 15th century, the amount of information that was provided into society is ever-increasing. Before this evolutionary invention, the public was limited to the information given on a specific subject due to the lack of resources. In the late 1800’s the telegraph was created. The first telegraph line was placed from Maine to Texas. The result of the telegraph line laid was the start of “junk” information being given throughout the United States. Soon after the telegraph was invented and newspapers were created, society was accumulating more information overtime. Soon after the telegraph was invented the first newspapers became a crucial part of information in the United States. Newspaper’s used the information received through the telegraph to document different stories that arose in the United States. People from Texas would receive daily news on what was happening in Maine on that certain day. Previous to the telegraph, the people in Texas would have never known or even cared what people in Maine were experiencing in a given day. The telegraph became the start of an info-glut world that is known to us today. The sudden surge of information that entered the brain of the person receiving the message was suddenly overcome by a new wave of information, ultimately molding the brain of our society to become very brief with the information we receive. This change of mind is what Postman referred to as the “peek-a-boo” world. The new inventions that changed discourse would provide a person with one event and then very quickly provide an entirely different, irrelevant event, like a child’s game of peek-a-boo. The start of this aspect of our society began to form the powerful age of show-business.

Television is currently the medium that a person refers to in order to gain information.

When a person seeks to gain any type of information such as news, sports highlights, or political updates, they generally refer to the television. This change, overtime, explains how entertainment, and television in particular, has become to main medium in reference. The entertainment that television provides has become a vital part of our life that has overcome certain areas such as news information, education, religion, and politics. The television shows that are daily church services are a popular form of practicing religion. The religious television shows are nothing in comparison to the sacred cathedrals that were meant to be to only grounds to practice religion. The religious shows on television often have people that appear to be faithful in religion. Some of the settings in the shows are colorful and are a tactic to gain viewers. The pastors in these religious programs are often whimsical to not only provide the viewer with religious ceremonies, but to also provide the viewer with entertainment. Religion was never intended to be any form of entertainment. Current-age politics focus mainly on the appearance of a leader and the virtues that the leader appears to posses. Current presidents display political campaign commercials that comment themselves in being a virtuous and strong leader. In these campaign commercials the candidate is seen doing a patriotic and caring action to signify what they would do if serving our country. In politics it is crucial for a candidate to have the necessary appearance for the title as president. Only once the president takes office do we, as a country, know the true person sitting in the oval office. Sesame Street was a television program that taught toddlers how to spell and obtain various basic knowledge of language. Sesame Street is a prime example of how education became intertwined with education. The main issue with this television program is that it teaches children, at a young age, to be constantly entertained while learning new information. This creates a negative habit amongst kids who expect education to be a constant form of entertainment, as seen in Sesame Street. Different institutions of education have funded a multi-million dollar project known as “The Voyage of Mimi.” This is a television show that applies mathematic and scientific skills into the entertainment of a television program. This project is a main component of an entertainment-based education. Television has become the means by which our society devotes itself to in various different aspects.

Section IV

Since Amusing Ourselves to Death was written in 1985 there has been a significant change in how society receives its information. Although the personal computer was introduced in the early 1980s, it wasn’t until the last decade that the internet became a popular source of information. The internet provides billions of different web pages that give information on anything from how to bake a cake to local sports scores. The ease of access the internet provides is also a big advantage in contrast to television. For example, if someone wanted to see recap of a sporting event they would have to wait for a specific television show to come on the air, while that person could easily access a single web page and gain that particular information on the sporting event. The internet pop-ups and advertisements serve as the television commercials of the internet, often brightly colored and catch one’s attention. As computers are becoming more popular in society, every generation is becoming more computer-oriented. Current school students are devoting much of their time to the internet and being a part of social networking groups. Programs such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and AIM are taking away some of the time that kids generally would devote to television. As children grow accustom to relying on the computer for several tasks, they will continue to use the computer for many things that once required viewing television. Many television shows and movies are being watched on-line. Websites such as Hulu broadcast television programs on their web page for anyone to watch at anytime, making it much more convenient for viewers. Apple recently released a program called Apple TV. It is a program where one can watch movies, watch television shows, play music, and even view photos. Computer-based programs such as Apple TV are slowly drawing the population away from television and toward computers. In modern society people are starting to rely more on computers, while relying less on television.

Section V

Throughout American history, our culture has seen a variety of change in public discourse. From the American invention of the telegraph in the 1800s came a new age of information. As other inventions were being created, such as the camera, our attention span shortened from the abundance of information that entered and left our brains so quickly. Everyday aspects of society such as politics, education, news, and religion have been consumed by television. As a society that constantly needs to be entertained, we have incorporated television and entertainment into our everyday lives. With the age of television, our society is focused mainly on how a situation appears to be, which is all made possible by the introduction of television into our culture. If a news program is not stacked with attractive people or catchy opening music then it is automatically deemed as being an inferior program in comparison to the thousands of other television programs. I agree with Postman when he states the dangers that television has created into our age of public discourse. If a certain aspect of American life is not entertaining then it is shown as being of little value. “The problem is not that television provides us with entertaining subject matter but that all subject matter is presented as entertaining” (Postman, Neil). Our society has undergone a series of negatives changes in public discourse.

Section VI

Postman, Neil. Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business. Boston:

Penguin (Non- Classics), 2005.

The main argument applies to the change in public discourse in American history. The most recent form of public discourse is television, which Postman strongly opposes. Postman believes that television has created a society that is focused mainly on being constantly entertained.

Neil Postman was an American educator, media theorist, and cultural critic. This book lays the foundation for the argument of current public discourse. Postman’s argument was well researched, but it also included some of his own opinions. This book is obviously the most information source on my topic.

*Amusing Ourselves to Death* introduced me to the topic of public discourse. Previous to reading this book I had practically no knowledge on the topic. Postman has enlightened me on a problem that is a regular part of my life. By reading this book I have begun to understand the change in public discourse and how it affects me personally.

"Amusing Ourselves to Death Summary and Analysis Summary." BookRags.com: Book Summaries, Study Guides. 6 May 2009 <http://www.bookrags.com/Amusing_Ourselves_to_Death>

This source includes many essays that are written supporting the book. The essays mostly address the issue of television being the main sources of information in today’s society. The essays strongly agree with Neil Postman’s view on television and how it is affecting our societal views.

This source is useful in supporting the problems that television creates. This source has more information that the other sources I collected, but it is just as useful as my other sources. This source will provide me with much needed information.

This source will help me in understand the role that television plays in our American culture. This source has provided me with abundant information supporting the negative claim of television on our culture. This source has strengthened my view on television in public discourse.

Bakshian , Aram . "PowerSearch  Logout." GaleNet. 6 May 2009 [http://find.galegroup.com/ips/retrieve.do?contentSet=IAC- Documents&resultListType=RESULT\_LIST&qrySerId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28k e%2CNone%2C26%29amusing+ourselves+to+death%24&sgHitCountType=None&inPS=true&sor t=DateDescend&searchType=BasicSearchForm&tabID=T003&prodId=IPS&searchId=R2&current Position=5&userGroupName=fairview&docId=A4148039&docType=IAC&contentSet=IAC- Documents](http://find.galegroup.com/ips/retrieve.do?contentSet=IAC-%09Documents&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&qrySerId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28k%09e%2CNone%2C26%29amusing+ourselves+to+death%24&sgHitCountType=None&inPS=true&sor%09t=DateDescend&searchType=BasicSearchForm&tabID=T003&prodId=IPS&searchId=R2&current%09Position=5&userGroupName=fairview&docId=A4148039&docType=IAC&contentSet=IAC-%09Documents)

The main argument in this article challenges to historical validity of some of the points addressed by Postman. It also questions some of the theories provided by Postman. This critique also goes in depth on television and the different programs and how it relates to our societal views.

This article was written in 1986 and was a national review by this author. This source provides valid arguments against *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. The source is biased upon the author’s opinion on some of the problems addressed in the book.

This source will help me when I am addressing the counter argument in my essay. This article is compiled of arguments against Postman and some of his societal claims. This source has made me think about some the counter arguments against Postman’s views.

Martin, James. "PowerSearch  Logout." GaleNet. 6 May 2009 [http://find.galegroup.com/ips/retrieve.do?subjectParam=&sort=DateDescend&tabID=T003&sg CurrentPosition=&subjectAction=&prodId=IPS&docId=A4148039&searchId=R2&bucketSubId=& userGroupName=fairview&docLevel=&resultListType=RESULT\_LIST&qrySerId=Locale(en,,):FQE=( ke,None,26)amusing+ourselves+to+death$&sgHitCountType=&inPS=true&searchType=BasicSea rchForm&currentPosition=4](http://find.galegroup.com/ips/retrieve.do?subjectParam=&sort=DateDescend&tabID=T003&sg%09CurrentPosition=&subjectAction=&prodId=IPS&docId=A4148039&searchId=R2&bucketSubId=&%09userGroupName=fairview&docLevel=&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&qrySerId=Locale(en,,):FQE=(%09ke,None,26)amusing+ourselves+to+death$&sgHitCountType=&inPS=true&searchType=BasicSea%09rchForm&currentPosition=4)

The main arguments deal with the news broadcasts on television. A good portion of Portman’s argument on television deals with news broadcasts. This source solidifies the argument presented by Postman, and gives specific example to agree with his argument.

The author wrote this column in the magazine *America*. The article deals with certain news stories and how they comply with many of Postman’s theories on news stories. This source is unique to my other sources because it provides specific examples that deal directly with Postman’s arguments.

This source helps me give examples on the arguments raised in the book. This source was helpful because it gave me in depth examples of Postman’s theory on news stories and television in general. This article has supported on some of my views on the subject of public discourse.

Robertson, Heather-Jane. "PowerSearch  Logout." GaleNet. 6 May 2009

[http://find.galegroup.com/ips/retrieve.do?contentSet=IAC- Documents&resultListType=RESULT\_LIST&qrySerId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28k e%2CNone%2C26%29amusing+ourselves+to+death%24&sgHitCountType=None&inPS=true&sor t=DateDescend&searchType=BasicSearchForm&tabID=T002&prodId=IPS&searchId=R4&current Position=2&userGroupName=fairview&docId=A158527917&docType=IAC&contentSet=IAC- Documents](http://find.galegroup.com/ips/retrieve.do?contentSet=IAC-%09Documents&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&qrySerId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28k%09e%2CNone%2C26%29amusing+ourselves+to+death%24&sgHitCountType=None&inPS=true&sor%09t=DateDescend&searchType=BasicSearchForm&tabID=T002&prodId=IPS&searchId=R4&current%09Position=2&userGroupName=fairview&docId=A158527917&docType=IAC&contentSet=IAC-%09Documents)

The main purpose of this article is to give specific number and facts about television use among Americans. This article is closely tied with Postman’s arguments on television and some of the problems it arises. The article also addresses some counterarguments of Portman’s research.

Heather-Jane Robertson wrote this article in the *Phi Delta Kappa* magazine. This source is useful because it gives specific examples of problems derived from television. The source also provides specific numbers for the amount of young viewers who use television.

The source not only addresses Portman’s argument on television, but it can help strengthen a counter argument of Portman’s work. This source is helpful to me because it gives many examples of the effects of television on youth. This source has helped me understand more of the topic by providing examples of television and its burden on society.

